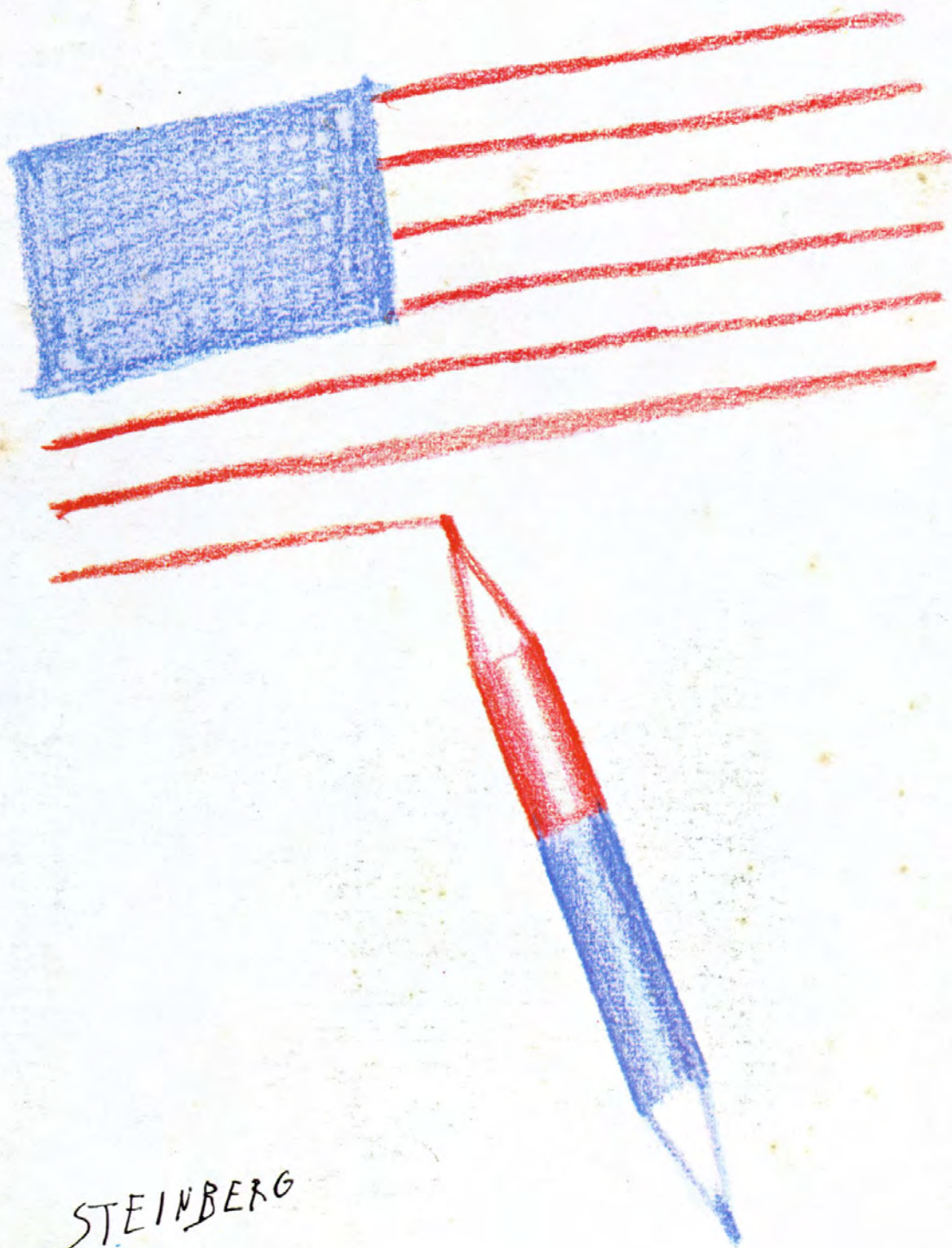


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STEINBERG



# PROFILES

## NEW PARADIGMS

IT is somewhat ironic that the Esalen Institute, in Big Sur, California, should have acquired a reputation mainly for encounter groups, public nudity, and a general spirit of emotional letting go. When Michael Murphy and Richard Price started the Institute, in 1962, neither of them had ever heard of an encounter group, and Murphy, at least, now has serious reservations about the ultimate value of the encounter process. It is true that encounter—which has been described as a way of achieving personal growth through the exploration of feelings among people gathered together for that purpose—owed a great deal of its vogue to the development it underwent at Esalen, and it is also true that the attacks on encounter therapy that now come with increasing frequency from the psychiatric profession usually single out Esalen as the fount of heresy. The fact of the matter, however, is that encounter groups have never accounted for more than a small percentage of the Esalen program, which includes lectures, workshops, and seminars on a seemingly limitless variety of subjects, from God in the Secular City to Mountain Aesthetics Along the Big Sur Coast.

"Mike Murphy never had a hard intellectual fix on any philosophical position," according to William Irwin Thompson, an author and teacher, who founded a more specifically spiritual learning community, Lindisfarne, on eastern Long Island. "That's what made Esalen different from what it would have been under someone like Buckminster Fuller or Paolo Soleri. He didn't put his stamp on the place—which meant that Alan Watts and Abraham Maslow and Fritz Perls and the others could come and use it for their own purposes. But Esalen wouldn't have happened without Mike. It all had its origin in his sensibility and his spiritual quality."

What Esalen did become, under the careful non-guidance of Murphy and Price, was an extremely influential center of the human-potential movement—a somewhat amorphous but rapidly growing effort to tap unsuspected resources of energy or perception or sensory awareness in all of us. Humanistic and transpersonal psychology, psy-



*Michael Murphy*

chosynthesis, transactional analysis, gestalt therapy, encounter, sensitivity training, and a panoply of "body-awareness" techniques are aspects of the movement, along with such mass-market packagings as Transcendental Meditation and Erhard Seminars Training (EST). Carried far enough, the human-potential idea leads to speculation about the transformation of man and society. According to Murphy and others, we are on the verge of tremendous social changes—changes as great as those that accompanied the evolution from hunting and gathering to farming and stock raising in the Neolithic age, or from feudal to modern society during the Industrial Revolution, the difference this time being that evolution has accelerated to such a degree that we can be aware of the changes as they are taking place, and can to some extent prepare ourselves for the post-industrial world that is in the process of being born. What is needed, the transformationalists say, is new paradigms—new models for looking at the nature of man and the universe. Talk of paradigms and paradigm shifts is often a clear sign that one is in

the presence of a transformationalist.

Recent developments in scientific research have lent reinforcement to some aspects of the human-potential idea. Brain researchers who have established that linguistic skill and analytical thought are associated with the left hemisphere of the brain, while the right hemisphere seems to handle the perceptual modes that we have thought of as intuitive, have opened up new perspectives on the so-called creative process. Through galvanic skin response and other "biofeedback" indicators, it has been shown that man can become aware of his own internal processes, such as blood pressure, nervous tension, and brain-wave patterns, and that by becoming aware of them he can learn to control them—as Indian yogis have been doing for centuries. Experiments of this sort have made it possible for scientists to take an interest in areas of human experience that were formerly considered fit for study only by humanists or divines. In fact, it is beginning to be thought that telepathy, clairvoyance, mystical transports, and other altered states of consciousness may be latent in most, if not all, of us, along with psychic powers and dominions not yet demonstrated. Is some revelation at hand? In a society whose institutions all seem to be crumbling, in a cosmos that has expanded lately to include antimatter and quarks and black holes, it grows easier to conceive that anything is possible. The myths of antiquity recur; the new journey, one hears, will be inward, into the depths of our conscious and unconscious powers. The new science will be closer to religion than to technology.

In a small, tidy studio on Telegraph Hill, with a view of San Francisco Bay from the Golden Gate to the Oakland Bay Bridge and beyond, Michael Murphy does a lot of thinking about such matters. The studio is upholstered in books—books on Tibetan Buddhism and Vedanta and Christianity and Islam; the complete works of Sri Aurobindo and Sri Ramakrishna; the Upanishads, in various translations; Meister Eckhart, St. John of the Cross, St. Theresa; Freud and Jung; Coleridge, Blake, Joseph Campbell, Plotinus, James Joyce. A whole library of



the human potential, past and present. Alone in his studio, Murphy practices yoga meditation and works on his second novel. His first, "Golf in the Kingdom," published by Viking in 1972, concerned the mystical aspects of Murphy's favorite game. The new one has to do with a contemporary artist whose preoccupations, like his Basque ancestors, are very similar to Murphy's own.

There is also another, less solitary Murphy, who lives with his new wife in the attractive suburb of Mill Valley, goes to all the home games of the San Francisco 49ers, runs five miles a day, and continues to serve as chairman of the board of the Esalen Institute. For the last year or so, he has been trying to extricate himself from the day-to-day operation of the Institute. He spends as little time as possible at Esalen's San Francisco office, on Union Street, and he seldom goes down to Big Sur. Dulce Murphy, the attractive, subtle, and highly competent girl he married last July, and who is director of the San Francisco office, does her best to shield him from excessive demands on his time, but it is a frustrating job. In addition to his other gifts, Murphy is endowed with a warm, responsive nature, extravagant good looks, and a wild Irish charm. His studio has an unlisted telephone number. Most of the time he is working there, he keeps the telephone unplugged. But sometimes people simply come and ring the doorbell until he answers.

Sam Keen, a writer and lecturer and one of Murphy's closest friends, said recently that there had been a real change in Murphy during the last three or four years—a sort of coming down to earth. "He's more of a friend than he used to be," Keen said. "There's more ordinary humanity, more of the sloppy side of friendship. He's more willing to come out and have a coffee with you at the Trieste. Also, he can get angry now—before, he was always a

little disembodied. Mike is a joyous mystic, you see. It's the ecstatic side of the religious nature—very rare these days. The danger in a person like Mike is that he's unmarked by life; he lives on such a high plane that he may not know what other people are going through. But this is changing."

Murphy himself said not long ago that what he really wanted to do was to live the life of Jacob Atabet, the central character in the novel he is writing. "Atabet discovers that the body is an opening into the secrets of time, a sort of evolutionary star gate," he said. "In it, the universe is remembered, level upon level. And so his lifelong voyage is back to the birth of the universe through this bodily descent. I really do believe that evolution is becoming conscious of itself in man, and that man is on the verge of a transformation. There's a great opening up, a synthesis now going on between intuition and intellect, body and mind, matter and spirit, East and West, and terms like 'the hu-

man potential' and 'transpersonal psychology' and 'altered states of consciousness' are emerging to deal with it. The new maps are all provisional, of course. But I think of this as the most exciting adventure ahead of us, and it's what I want to do for the next forty years."

WHEN Murphy was growing up—in Salinas, about forty-five miles from where the Esalen Institute is now—he alternated between wanting to be a doctor and wanting to be a minister. The doctor idea came from his grandfather, Henry Murphy, who was the town's leading physician. Dr. Murphy, born and raised in Bristol, Tennessee, did so well with his practice in Salinas that he was able to build two hospitals there. He delivered a great many of the babies born in town—including John Steinbeck, who is said to have used Michael and his younger brother Dennis as models for the two brothers in his novel "East of Eden." Murphy sometimes dreams about his



*"I'd like to present Mr. Bilkins. Mr. Bilkins is not a lawyer."*



grandfather. "Gramp lived in a big house, and he was such a figure in town," he says. "He didn't have any business sense at all, but my grandmother did. She was a very strong character—forbidding at times—and she took over their business affairs quite early, and invested in real estate, and did pretty well with it." She also took Michael and Dennis to church for the first time, in 1944, when Michael was fourteen—their parents were not churchgoers. The Episcopal service made little impression on twelve-year-old Dennis, but Michael was enthralled by it. He went to church every Sunday after that, eventually becoming an altar boy. That summer, he spent a month at an Episcopal church camp and came back saying he had decided to be a minister. This went on for several years—each summer he would go to church camp and opt for the ministry, but then, over the winter, to his parents' relief, he would tilt again toward Grandfather Murphy and medical school.

Both Michael and Dennis Murphy were bright, popular, and sports-mad. Good at most games, they both excelled at golf—their father, who was a lawyer and a golfer, started them off early. By 1946, Michael was playing in junior tournaments around the state. That same year, Dennis shot a 2 on the notoriously difficult, par-4 tenth hole at the Pebble Beach Golf Links, overlooking Carmel Bay—an event that is still remembered with awe in the local pro shop. Sports counted for a lot in the Murphy family, where life had its ups and downs. "My parents had an enormous capacity for having a good time," Michael recalls. "My mother in particular had this gift of buoyant joy, which I like to think came from her Basque parents; her father had been a shepherd from a town near Pau, in the Pyrenees. There was a lot of tension in the family, too. Stormy days and sunny days, light and darkness. But through it all my parents' fidelity to each other and to us held the pain and the joy together and contributed, I think, to my sense of a happiness and a meaning behind all the contrary appearances. Denny and I had very different strategies for coping with the dark side of things. He would plunge into the middle of the troubles; I would always withdraw. When I was about fourteen, I began deliberately to work out a philosophy to deal with this. It became a kind of daily ritual to work at it while I walked to school—to try to come to terms with this incredible sense I had that joy was

## ONIONSKIN: FOR THE NEW YEAR

Already there is as much behind as ahead.  
Knowing this we link arms, here, high  
on the cusp of the city, in the vicinity  
of this moment. Refugees, we strain  
for a glimpse of the New World, ready  
to astonish any absolute. Below,  
the Charles spins its sinuous flow  
of detail under bridges of pure reason  
as we smile for the gap-toothed honey  
who snaps us for posterity. Yes,  
it has become impossible to be human;  
we agree that we are what is good  
about time. And sing for all we're worth,  
our whiskey gargle the unravelling onionskin  
of too many near collisions.

—PHILIP SCHULTZ

*lurking*, that there was such richness and beauty laid up at the core of life, and at the same time there was all this pain and unhappiness. I worked out a kind of naïve theory about emanations—that there were emanations of something that was descending, trying to come into being, and that the basic thing to do in life was to help that happen. I also started reading a lot then—Will Durant's 'The Story of Philosophy,' Emerson, and especially Jung. I actually used to go around spouting Jung in high school, and I had just about decided to become a psychiatrist." None of this seemed to bother his classmates at Salinas High, where he was valedictorian of his class, president of the student body, and captain of the golf team.

Rather introverted as a young child, Michael had become a "raging extrovert," as he puts it, in high school, and he continued in that vein during his first two years at Stanford. (He had turned down a scholarship to Harvard in favor of Stanford—largely, he now feels, because of the happy memories he had of watching football games there with his parents.) His career as a campus hot dog came to an abrupt halt, however, in 1950, in the second semester of his sophomore year, when he wandered by accident into Professor

Frederic Spiegelberg's opening lecture on comparative religion. Spiegelberg was a great figure at Stanford—a world-famous Asian scholar and a mesmerizing lecturer. Murphy, who had been going through the traditional sophomore atheist phase, found his spine tingling as he listened to Spiegelberg discourse on the five-thousand-year-old beginnings of Hindu religion. "He opened the course with the Rig-Veda—the Vedic hymns—and with this early version of the Brahman, the divine spirit. Spiegelberg had been a great friend and colleague of Paul Tillich, and, like Tillich, although he had all that scholarship, his real gift was being able to transmit his own intuitive hold on a subject. When he said 'Brahman,' it was a sacred utterance!"

The meeting of East and West, prophesied in F. S. C. Northrop's famous book of that title, was very much in the air at that period, particularly in California. Paramhansa Yogananda, the first "great master" from India to settle for a long period in the West, had established himself in Los Angeles as early as 1924; others had followed, among them Swami Prabhavananda, who became the teacher of the transplanted Englishmen Aldous Huxley, Gerald Heard, and Christopher Isherwood. Spiegelberg himself had recently been to India and had met the great yogi Ramana Maharshi (whom Somerset Maugham had visited in 1936, later drawing on the experience for his novel "The Razor's Edge"), Aurobindo Ghose, and other religious leaders. (In 1951, Spiegelberg became the first director of the American Academy of Asian Studies, in San Francisco. The Academy attracted many important scholars, including Haridas Chaudhuri, from India, and Alan Watts, the



Anne Burgess





*"I see by the current issue of 'Lab News,' Ridgeway, that you've been working for the last twenty years on the same problem I've been working on for the last twenty years."*

former Episcopal chaplain of Northwestern University, who became an authority on Zen Buddhism and exerted a compelling influence on the Beat Generation poets and writers. It also attracted Murphy, who took courses there while he was still at Stanford.) Spiegelberg's lectures seemed to Murphy to be supercharged with personal meaning, and toward the end of the semester, when Spiegelberg got to Aurobindo, he felt an almost overwhelming surge of recognition. Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950) was, in Spiegelberg's view, the master spirit of our age. "He thought that Aurobindo and Heidegger were the two greatest philosophers of the twentieth century," Murphy says, "but that because Aurobindo had come to knowledge through his own experience and through yoga, he had more depth than Heidegger, who had come to it out of intellectual genius. Actually, I started reading Auro-

bindo's 'The Life Divine' before Spiegelberg got to him in the course, and it had an incredible impact on me. Aurobindo's stuff about the evolution of consciousness here on earth fitted right in with my own very primitive and naïve notions. There was a tremendous feeling of everything falling into place."

That autumn, Murphy took Spiegelberg's course in Indian religion, and joined a group of students who met twice a week to discuss "The Life Divine." Walt Page, a graduate student with a streak of white hair running down the middle of his head, was the group's animating spirit. Page had a powerful, precariously balanced mind and a pressing need for disciples. Murphy resisted becoming a follower—when six of the group went away with Page during Christmas vacation to form a sort of commune off campus, he was not among them. ("Gradually,

they all came back," he recalls. "One of them told me they'd got into a convoluted and rather sordid situation, but he was still so much under Page's spell that he could hardly talk about it. Several years later, we heard that Page had committed suicide.") By this time, Murphy had made a final decision not to go to medical school. He stopped taking money from his parents, feeling that he had disappointed their expectations; what spending money he needed he earned by waiting on tables at his fraternity house. He dropped out of all extracurricular activities and saw few people outside class. That spring, Dennis Murphy, after hitchhiking across the country, stopped by the Stanford campus to say hello to his brother. He found him in a small room at the top of a tower, deep in a meditative trance. "I poked him in the chest," Dennis says, "and he opened his eyes, and said, 'I've been expecting



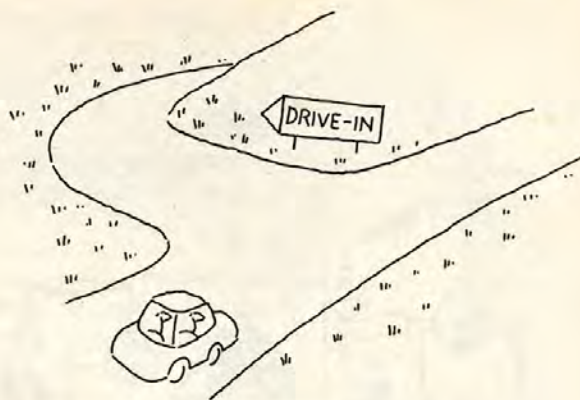
you.' That was the first time he became Jesus."

WHEN Murphy graduated from Stanford, in 1952, the Korean war was still going on. He was drafted into the Army and sent to Puerto Rico, where he spent the next two years interviewing draftees to check for malingerers (he found only two possible cases), and reading a great deal of history. He also wrote a letter to the Aurobindo ashram in Pondicherry, asking permission to go there when he got out of the service. The first reply was affirmative, but a little later another letter arrived, telling him not to come. After completing his Army service, he went back to Stanford with the idea of taking a doctorate in philosophy, but something was wrong. "I began developing weird symptoms—obsessional thoughts that I was going to have an epileptic fit. I was studying pre-Socratic philosophy, analyzing ideas, making charts—all that left-brain stuff—and inwardly I kept thinking I had to go to India. One night, I woke up and felt I was going to disappear. There was just going to be nothing left of me. I dressed, went outside, and started to run. I ran for two hours, trying to get my body back. A few nights later, the same thing happened. I really thought I was going crazy. But I had enough insight to know that I was just doing violence to what I really wanted, and so in 1956 I went to India. I went to Europe first. Because of all that history I'd been reading, I wanted to see places like the Forum in Rome, Reims Cathedral, London, and Edinburgh—the Edinburgh trip later became the basis for 'Golf in the Kingdom.' And, oh, Christ, I was being chased by this girl! It was so funny—I was a virgin until the age of thirty-two. In high school, everything was so innocent, and then, getting religion when I was so young... Anyway, I met this girl on the Ile-de-France going over; she was about five years older than I was, and it was like a French farce. I was determined to keep my virginity until I got to the ashram! Finally, she got disgusted and took off. All my symptoms disappeared on the trip. I went to Rome and made such a commotion at the Indian Embassy, saying I would wire Nehru direct, that I scared them into giving me a visa in one day. I went on to Egypt, and had a great time with the pyramids and all that, and then I travelled around India for a while before going to Pondicherry. The ashram had heard I was coming—I knew a couple of Americans who

were staying there, and I'd written to them. So I just presented myself, and they let me stay."

The life and works of Aurobindo Ghose are still not widely known in the West. Born in Bengal but brought up and educated in England, Aurobindo began his political activity in the cause of Indian independence in 1902, some fifteen years before Gandhi appeared on the scene. The British arrested him as a terrorist, and while in jail he had a profound religious experience that altered his life. Released in 1909, he retired soon afterward to the French colony of Pondicherry and, with a group of disciples, founded the ashram where he spent the rest of his life working out his philosophy of the evolution of human consciousness. Aurobindo believed that mankind had come to a "crisis of transformation" comparable to the prehistoric appearance of mind in living creatures. Through the discipline of yoga, he explored and charted in himself the successive stages of ascending consciousness, leading to the moment when the Supramental consciousness would descend and transform man's nature and, with it, the terrestrial world. From 1926 on, Aurobindo pursued his quest in seclusion, seeing only a handful of followers.

Over the years, Aurobindo's ashram grew to be the largest in India, accommodating nearly two thousand people. The members grew most of their own food crops and lived together as a nearly self-sufficient community, under the direction of a remarkable Frenchwoman, Mme. Paul Richard, who had appeared on the scene, with her husband, soon after Aurobindo arrived. Paul Richard was a politician who had come out to run for the French Chamber of Deputies as the candidate from Pondicherry; both he and his wife became fascinated with Aurobindo, and they founded a journal, *Arya*, to publish his writings. The outbreak of the First World War forced them to leave India. Later, they were separated, and in 1920 Mme. Richard returned alone to Pondicherry to devote the rest of her life to Aurobindo. She took over the management of the ashram, saw to its continued growth, and served as the principal link between Aurobindo and the world. Aurobindo died in 1950, but the Mother, as Mme. Richard had

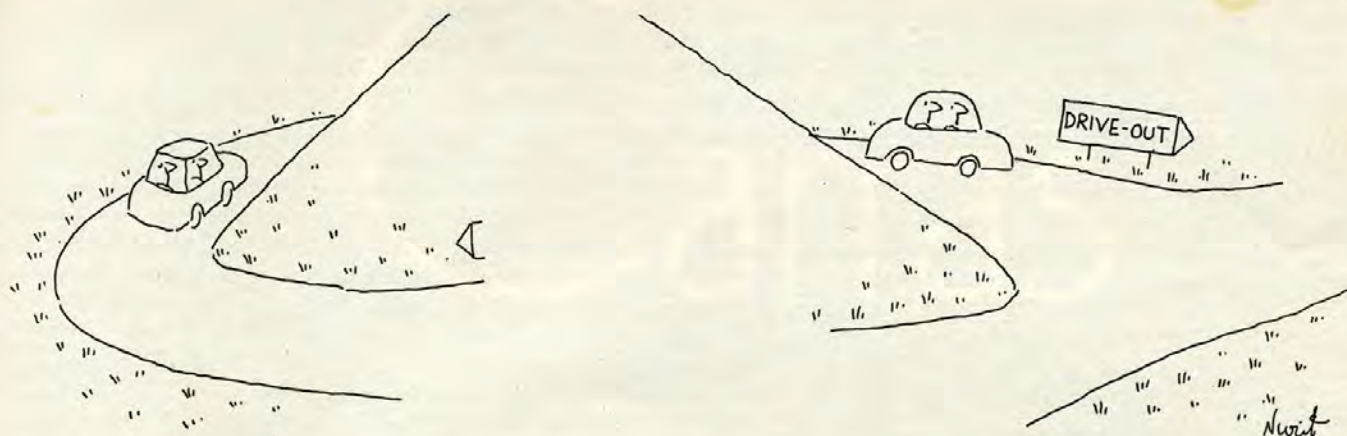


come to be known, was still there when Murphy arrived. She was in her late seventies, and she was a formidable woman, whose spiritual force Murphy soon experienced at first hand.

An American girl at the ashram was behaving very strangely. She had fallen in love with a boy whom Murphy had known at Stanford, but the rules of the ashram forbade intimate relationships (as well as alcohol, tobacco, and politics). The boy had gone off alone to the Himalayas, and the girl was in great distress. Every evening, the members of the ashram gathered in a large open space for *darshan*, when they would file by the Mother and each person would experience an individual, momentary transmission of her presence, symbolized by the giving of a flower, perhaps, or a few words. One night, the girl was seen standing beside the Mother throughout the ceremony—a breach of etiquette that scandalized the devout. A few nights later, someone came running to Murphy's room to tell him that the girl was going to kill herself. She was standing on the roof of the highest building in the compound, the one called the Golconda, and she had a rope around her neck. Murphy went up on the roof and managed to coax her down, but afterward he thought he had better have a talk with the Mother.

"It was quite a juxtaposition for me," he said. "I had seen the Mother in this numinous way, and now here I was face to face with her, talking about this situation. I could see she was very upset by what had happened. An Englishman had killed himself three months before at the ashram, and there were two other Westerners who'd had psychotic breaks that same year. It was one of the reasons they were saying no to Western applicants. Anyway, the Mother said that I would have to stand by the girl and be very watchful. It happened again about a week later. I looked up, and there on the roof of the





Golconda, silhouetted against the sky, was this ghostly figure standing right at the edge. It was a drop of about sixty feet, down to a concrete walk with reflecting pools. I went straight to the Mother, who was just getting ready for the evening *darshan*. I could see her sort of shudder all over. She said, 'I will use you as my agent. Go up and be with her.' So I climbed up to the roof. I sat down some distance away, sensing that if I made any kind of sudden move toward her she could really go over. I started to meditate. And, with that, I felt this incredible—It was like billowing waves. It's hard to believe that it could have been just suggestion. Pretty soon, I forgot all about the girl. But gradually she came toward me and sat down, and eventually I got her to come downstairs. Soon afterward, we managed to get her into a hospital, and from there she went back to New York."

In spite of his experience on the roof, Murphy never did become one of the ashram's true believers. Aurobindo's teachings had acquired since his death a rigidity that they did not have when he was alive, and the Mother tended, according to Murphy, to make dogmatic pronouncements. Murphy disliked the cult atmosphere, but he liked most of the other aspects of life at the ashram very much. Somewhat to his surprise, he found that great emphasis was placed there on the body—on physical well-being and sports. In addition to hatha yoga and some of the Asian martial arts, there was soccer, cricket, track, basketball, and swimming. Murphy himself introduced softball, which was taken up enthusiastically by several of the Asian members. Afternoons at the ashram were given over mainly to sports, and the mornings, at least in Murphy's case, to meditation and study. There was no formal instruction in Aurobindo's philosophy; relatively few of the Indians there, Murphy discovered, had even read

"The Life Divine." The arts were encouraged—nearly everyone wrote poetry (Aurobindo had also been a poet), and the Mother herself wrote didactic plays, which Murphy found awful. His own life there came to center more and more on meditation. He could meditate for four and five hours at a time. There are dangers to this sort of total immersion, as he found out two years later, back in the United States, when he tried to imitate Ramana Maharshi's feat of meditating while gazing at the sun. Murphy gazed at it for half an hour. Afterward, he felt strangely depressed, and that night the street lamps looked blood-red to him. He went to an eye doctor, who asked what he had done, and then called in three colleagues to look. The doctor told him to come back in a week. His eyesight improved a little during the week, and when he went back for his appointment the doctor said he was very lucky—he had come close to losing his sight, and there was nothing that anyone could have done about it.

**A**FTER a year and a half at the ashram, Murphy went back to Palo Alto. He took a room in the same house he had lived in as a graduate student and continued his life of meditation and study, working two days a week to support himself. He took gardening work, and he was a bellhop at Rickey's Inn, where the Green Bay Packers stayed when they came to the West Coast. (Murphy was delighted to carry their bags.) In the summer of 1960, learning that Haridas Chaudhuri, one of Aurobindo's leading disciples, had set up a center in a big old house on Fulton Street where students could live and study and meditate, he moved to San Francisco. It was at this point that he met Richard Price. Although Murphy and Price had been in the same class as undergraduates at Stanford, they had not known each

other there. Price, who came from a well-to-do Illinois family, had majored in psychology at Stanford; he had no religious leanings, and he was interested mainly in social anthropology. After graduating from Stanford, he took a year of graduate study in clinical psychology at Harvard and then went into the Air Force, where he had what the military considered a nervous breakdown—to Price it seemed more like an ecstatic experience. He spent the next six months in military hospitals, after which his family had him committed to the Institute of Living, a private hospital in Hartford, Connecticut, which Price came to regard as a private prison. (Murphy sometimes says that Esalen is Price's revenge on mental hospitals.) In 1960, Price was in San Francisco, "waiting for the world to come around," as he puts it. At the suggestion of one of his friends, he went to visit the Chaudhuri center on Fulton Street, where he found Murphy. Price moved into the house soon afterward. In their thinking, Murphy said not long ago, "Dick and I found we were in very similar places."

Murphy supported himself in San Francisco by working two days a week for a shipping-news journal. When the editor told him he would either have to work full time or quit, he quit, and suggested to Price, more or less on the spur of the moment, that they go down and look at some property his family owned in Big Sur. Murphy's grandfather, the Salinas physician, had bought the land in 1910—three hundred and seventy-five acres of rugged mountain and coastline—with the idea of developing it into a health spa on the European model. Hot mineral springs flowed out of the rocks on a cliff overlooking the Pacific—springs that the Esalen Indians had bathed in for centuries before the white man arrived. Dr. Murphy had built bathhouses over the springs and installed bathtubs, which had to be brought in on a fish-



ing boat and derricked up the cliff, because there were then no roads in Big Sur. He had also built a large house and one or two smaller ones, but he had died before the spa idea came to fruition.

When the Murphy boys were growing up, their parents used to take them to Big Sur on weekends and in the summer. Dennis loved the place; Michael, who didn't care for hunting or fishing, often felt that he would rather have been home playing games with his friends. Grandfather Murphy had wanted the property to remain in the family, and his widow had respected his wishes. When Michael and Dick Price went down to look at it in 1961, however, some fairly peculiar things were going on there. Michael's grandmother had appointed a friend of hers, a Mrs. Webb, to act as caretaker of the property, and Mrs. Webb was using one of the buildings as a meeting place for the First Church of God of Prophecy, an evangelical sect to which she belonged. The evangelicals coexisted on somewhat uneasy terms with the assorted types who went down to use what was then known as Slate's Hot Springs, after the original homesteader on the property. Henry Miller was living in Big Sur then, and he and his friends used to go over to the baths occasionally. A much rougher crowd, known collectively as "the Big Sur Heavies"—people who camped out in the mountains for a variety of reasons, not the least of which were said to be drug dealing and the cultivation of marijuana—also used the baths, and so did a growing number of male homosexuals, some of whom came from as far away as San Francisco and Los Angeles. Murphy and Price were appalled by the goings on at the baths. The situation had clearly got out of hand, and it occurred to Murphy that maybe he ought to do something about it. Why not, he thought, take over the family property and start a center to explore their own interests in philosophy, psychology, social anthropology, and the more esoteric disciplines? "It was as simple as that,"

Murphy recalls. "I'd had something like the same idea when I was in India, but nothing had come of it. Now, though, there was a good deal of pressure building up from my family for me to do *something*—here I was thirty and still just meditating." Price liked the idea. He had a small income of his own, and was not tied down to anything in particular. Seeking further guidance, they drove to Santa Monica to discuss the plan with Gerald Heard, the writer and mystic, whom Murphy had met through mutual friends at Stanford. Heard gave them a lot of encouragement, and so did Heard's friend Aldous Huxley. "Suddenly, everything was charged with meaning and excitement," Murphy says.

They next went to Salinas to talk things over with Michael's grandmother. She was in her late eighties then, still vigorous and not easily won over. The idea sounded faintly reminiscent of Dr. Murphy's dream of a European health spa, and it appealed to her for that reason, but she was dubious about her grandson's ability to run any sort of enterprise. Finally, she consented to let them have it on a long-term lease. "I can't give it to you, Mike," she said. "Because I know you'd just give it away to some Hindu." She also insisted

that Mrs. Webb remain in control of the property until the end of her lease, which had three months to run.

Murphy and Price decided to wait out the interval at Big Sur, where they were looked upon with considerable suspicion. Word of what they were planning got out, and nobody liked it. They put up a steel fence around the baths, with a gate that they locked at night, but night after night the lock was either picked or broken. Michael's grandmother had hired a guard, a Kentuckian in his early twenties named Hunter Thompson (the future gonzo journalist), who lived in the main house on the property and was charged with keeping out intruders. One night, a bunch of aggrieved homosexuals ambushed him and nearly succeeded in throwing him over the cliff. Calling the police was no solution; the nearest town, Carmel, was forty miles up the coast, by a slow and winding road. Murphy and Price were not entirely without allies. Besides Hunter Thompson, they could count on support from Joan Baez—not yet famous as a folk-singer—and her boyfriend, and from two other young couples, friends of hers, who had rented shacks on the property from Mrs. Webb, and who were building a trimaran that they planned to sail to Tahiti. Heavily outnumbered as they were, the future proprietors decided to provoke a showdown.

On what came to be known as the Night of the Dobermans, Murphy and Price locked themselves in at the baths and sat down to wait. Almost immediately, they heard a thunderous commotion on the path leading down to the hot springs, and moments later they were joined by about a dozen young males in T-shirts and bluejeans. A retreat seemed advisable at this point. Murphy and Price walked back up the hill, to the accompaniment of loud taunts and jeers, and set out to round up their cohorts. Murphy went to where Joan Baez and her friends were living, and got the men to come out and bring their dogs—three young Doberman pinschers on short leashes. The assembled home forces then headed back toward the baths. On the way, the two male



*"Just once, can't you let it break through? Never a smile—only that suggestion of a smile."*



Dobermans got into a vicious battle over the female. Dobermans are noisy fighters—no silent bulldog grips for them. The owners finally got the dogs apart and continued down to the baths, but nobody was there. They came back up the hill to find the invaders regrouped in the main parking lot. They were about thirty strong by then, menacing but dogless. The male Dobermans had another set-to at the edge of the parking lot, and again the night air was rent by sounds of unimaginable savagery. The owners got them separated again just in time to see the last of the enemy jumping into cars and lamming it up the road.

That was the end of the homosexuals, and also of the First Church of God of Prophecy. Mrs. Webb and her frightened followers moved out a few days later. Murphy and Price took over the property, posted guards at the entrance, and negotiated a compromise with the Big Sur Heavies—the baths would be open to anyone, gratis, every night from midnight to 6 A.M. By and large, this is still the situation. Esalen guests are advised not to visit the baths after midnight, and those who do are presumably prepared for what they may find there. Murphy himself feels that the somewhat lawless, Wild West atmosphere surrounding the baths has played an important part in the development of Esalen's unique character. "I think a lot of the atmosphere of the place came from this outlaw element, having these people around," he has said. "It may have contributed to the kind of try-anything spirit of the place. For a while, we tried to make rules and have separate sides of the baths for men and women, but that kept breaking down, so finally we just said the hell with it."

ONE of the amazing things about Esalen is that its founders never did have a clear plan for the place. Both of them wanted a center where people from different disciplines could meet and exchange ideas. They liked to think of their approach as Taoist—letting things develop naturally, even if that led (as it did) to continuing chaos and a certain degree of mismanagement. They would not impose their own thinking on others. Murphy sometimes says, a bit ruefully,

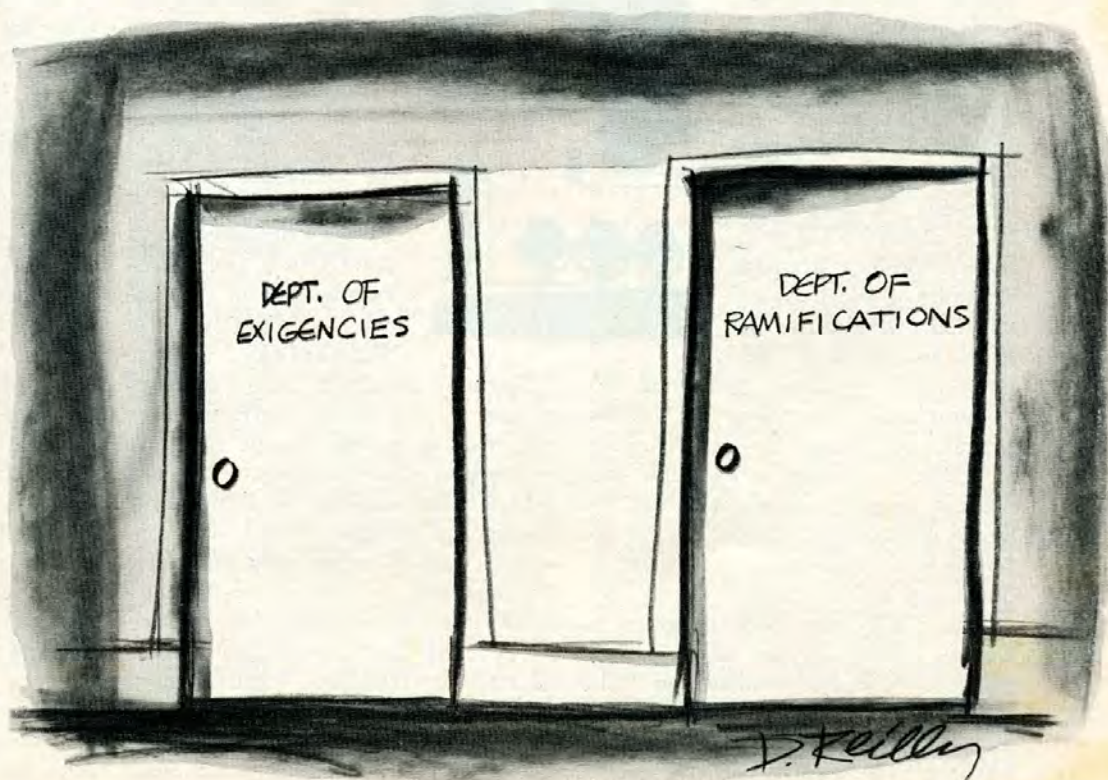
that he has never yet been able to get anyone at Big Sur to read the works of Aurobindo.

Price took over the administrative side of the operation, while Murphy threw himself into programming and promotion. His enthusiasm seemed boundless. "I've sometimes thought that the tremendous energy with which I plunged into Esalen came from the submerged extrovert who'd been in the closet all those years," he observed recently. "It just seemed to come rushing out." He and Price spent the first year working on the grounds and buildings, planning, and lining up people to lecture or give seminars. One of Murphy's earliest supporters was John Levy, a onetime engineer whose interests had turned toward psychology. (He later became the guiding spirit and executive officer of the Association for Humanistic Psychology, in San Francisco.) "I felt quite confident that Mike would make a go of it, mainly because of his combination of self-confidence and humility," Levy said a while ago. "A lot of people in this area have plenty of self-confidence and enthusiasm, but they can also be pretty arrogant. Mike never came on as somebody who knew he had the message, and that in itself was impressive." Certainly Murphy seemed to have no trouble persuading people to come to Big Sur. Aldous Huxley, Gerald Heard, Alan Watts, Arnold Toynbee, Frederic Spiegelberg, Ken Kesey, S. I. Hayakawa, Linus Pauling, Paul Tillich, Gary Snyder, Norman O.

Brown, Rollo May, Bishop James A. Pike, Carl Rogers, B. F. Skinner, Carlos Castaneda (then a graduate student at U.C.L.A.), and a host of others who might seem to have had little in common gave lectures or seminars or just dropped in during the first three years of Esalen's existence, and paying guests arrived in sufficient numbers to finance a steady expansion of the facilities.

At first, Murphy and Price and a few paid employees did all the work. One of their more remarkable assistants was a Chinese-born financier named Gia Fu Feng, who had gone to the Wharton School of Finance and Commerce, at the University of Pennsylvania, and had worked for a while on Wall Street. Feng had more or less decided to go back to mainland China in 1960, but when he got to San Francisco he met Alan Watts, discovered Zen and other aspects of his Oriental heritage, and decided that perhaps Mao's China was not the place for him after all. Watts introduced him to Murphy and Price, and Feng offered his services. For a while, he was the chief cook at Esalen; he also kept the accounts, on an abacus, and taught Tai Chi Chuan.

Esalen was certified as a nonprofit educational institution, and, thanks in part to the general inefficiency that prevails there, it has always had difficulty staying out of the red. From the outset, though, the omens were highly propitious. Murphy and Price were eager to meet Abraham Maslow, the





real father of humanistic psychology, whose work had struck them as a natural bridge between the psychiatric establishment and all the new trends that were emerging. One foggy night in the summer of 1962, Maslow and his wife happened to be driving south on the precipitous coast road through Big Sur. Seeing a light and thinking that it might be a place where they could spend the night, they pulled into Esalen's parking lot, knocked on the door of the main house, and introduced themselves to a group of astonished people who had read Maslow's books. Their hosts insisted that they stay. Maslow returned many times after that to lead seminars, and his friendship was an important factor in the Institute's growth.

Although Maslow later became president of the American Psychological Association, he saw his own humanistic psychology as a "third-force" alternative to strict Freudianism and its offshoots, which ruled the psychoanalytic profession, and to the behavioristic psychology that had become dominant in most university psychology departments. Freudian analysis has traditionally been focussed on the pathology of human behavior. Maslow and his followers shifted their attention to the enormous and largely unsuspected possibilities for human growth in so-called normal people—the untapped human potential. And in place of the behaviorists' mechanistic concept of human nature as a network of conditioned responses, Maslow posited a human nature that is partly species-wide and partly unique. Most of us, according to Maslow, are capable, moreover, of what he termed "peak experiences"—breakthrough moments of deep emotional understanding or intensity, the most dramatic examples of which are the spiritual revelations of saints and mystics. "My thesis is, in general, that new developments in psychology are forcing a profound change in our philosophy of science, a change so extensive that we may be able to accept the basic religious questions as a proper part of the jurisdiction of science, once science is broadened and redefined," Maslow has written. The very first program at Esalen, offered in the fall of 1962, was a series of four seminars on "The Human Potentiality;" the opening seminar dealt in detail with the work of Maslow. The human-potential move-

ment has been the focus of a great deal that has taken place at Esalen since, although neither Maslow nor anyone else could have felt easy about some of the experiments carried out there in its name.

Looking back now on the early years, Murphy and Price sometimes wonder how they managed to surmount the multiple disasters. Several of the first group of seminarians (as Esalen quaintly calls its paying guests) witnessed a nearly fatal attack on Dennis Murphy in 1963. Dennis, who had published a best-selling novel ("The Sergeant") in 1958, and who was living in a house of his own on the Big Sur property while working on his second, got into an argument with a local artist, and before anyone realized what was happening the artist had stabbed him nine times with a knife. Dennis survived. Michael got him to the hospital in Monterey, spent a sleepless night, and came into his room the next morning to find Dennis sitting up in bed smoking a cigar and trying to blow smoke through his wounds. (Dennis subsequently left Big Sur for Los Angeles, where he became a successful screenwriter.) A couple of the early employees at Esalen were arrested on drug charges, in spite of strict anti-drug regulations laid down by Murphy and Price, and undercover narcotics agents often prowled the premises. But in the main the seminarians were getting high on experiences that had no connection with drugs. The most popular programs were the various body-awareness and encounter groups, in which almost anything could happen.



"T-group" methods were designed mainly to help people perform more effectively in groups—in the Army, in business, in scientific laboratories—and to minimize tensions by being more honest and straightforward with one another and by letting their suppressed feelings come to the surface. Lewin's work led to the founding of the National Training Laboratories, with headquarters in Arlington, Virginia, many of whose clients are industrial corporations. It was soon discovered, however, that the process of taking part in small

group sessions of this nature often led to extraordinary emotional reactions among the participants. The power of a group to elicit such responses was hardly a new discovery; primitive shamans knew about it, revivalist preachers make use of it all the time, and group therapy has long been an accepted aspect of psychiatric practice. But the idea of using the group as a lever to bring about emotional breakthroughs in normally healthy individuals seemed to touch a highly sensitive nerve in America in the affluent nineteen-sixties. The eminent psychologist Carl Rogers, who popularized the term "encounter," has called it "the most rapidly spreading social invention of the century, and probably the most potent." New group techniques proliferated in the sixties—particularly on the West Coast. Encounter, sensory awareness, gestalt therapy, transactional analysis, marathons, psychodrama, and other shortcuts to "personal growth" blossomed in suburban community centers, in churches, and even in private houses throughout the land, together with the more esoteric practices of Sufism, Zen, and yoga. It is probably true that all this would have happened without Esalen, but it is also true that Esalen was for several years the narrow neck of the funnel—the place where many of the new methods were tried out and developed before they spread into the larger community. It was the laboratory, and there were occasions when it appeared to be on the brink of blowing up.

The danger, of course, lay in its great appeal to mad scientists. Murphy and Price kept a sharp eye on the leaders of the early encounter sessions. There was no real training course for such leaders, and no agreed-on credentials except sensitivity, intelligence, and a high degree of self-awareness; psychiatric training, with its doctor-patient orientation, often seemed to be the worst sort of preparation for the subtle give-and-take of effective group process. Murphy attended almost every one of the seminars given at Esalen in the first four years—more than two hundred in all, about ten of which were straight encounter groups. If he felt that a leader showed signs of cruelty or insensitivity, that leader was not invited back. But what was one to do with a mad genius like Fritz Perls?

Frederick S. Perls visited Esalen for the first time in 1964, and two years later he returned there to live. A lot of people were scared to death of him. He spoke with a heavy German accent, he had a very large head with



intense, penetrating eyes and a beard that went in all directions, and he wore a sort of jump suit with heavy bead necklaces. Dennis Murphy once dreamed of Perls as a huge, room-filling head with hairs coming out of his nose and ears and brushing against the walls on either side. In his younger years in Europe, Perls had studied with Max Reinhardt, and his methods were nothing if not theatrical. Gestalt therapy, which Perls developed in the fifties (and which is not to be confused with the experimental science of Gestalt psychology), proceeded on the assumption that under proper conditions and with proper techniques the neurotic symptoms that prevented people from realizing their own true natures could be brought to the surface in relatively short order, without months or years of analysis. One of Perls' techniques was to gather a group of people and call for a volunteer to sit beside him in what he called "the hot seat" and to relate a recent dream. Perls maintained that every part of a dream—an inanimate object, an animal, a gesture—was a projection of the dreamer. He would make the person in the hot seat act out all these aspects—if the dream had a chest of drawers in it, the subject would have to become the chest of drawers. In the process, Perls would notice something about the subject, something that was being unconsciously avoided or repressed, and he would proceed step by step to bring it out, forcing the subject to a final stage that he called "the impasse"—an emotional climax followed, with luck, by a cathartic recognition. "Fritz had the most fabulous clinical mind I've ever seen," Murphy recalls. "He could spot where the problem was, and he had a genius for pushing it to the surface—that's why he was so scary. And with Fritz the therapy game was going all the time; he was that way at lunch or in the baths." Once, when Perls thought the leader of a certain seminar was being pompous, he crawled the length of the room on all fours by way



*"Now, will this be cash or credit?"*

of protest. ("This is beginning to look like sickness," Abraham Maslow, who saw the performance, murmured to Murphy.) Although Perls terrified people, his seminars were always crowded, and there was never any lack of volunteers for the hot seat.

Another game that Perls played to the hilt was one that Murphy and Price called Capture the Flag. He wanted to make Esalen over in his own image—to get rid of the religious and mystical aspects, and turn it into the world center of gestalt therapy. Perls himself became quite famous while he was at Esalen; his book on gestalt therapy was worshipped by college students, and all sorts of people were attracted to Esalen by his powerful presence. Ida Rolf, a therapist who had developed her own theory and method of "structural integration" of the body through deep massage (called "Rolfing"), soon came to Esalen at Perls' invitation and became a part-time resident. Several other younger psychologists came to study with Perls, and Price, who had begun by disliking him, went on to study under him and to become, after four years, an exceptionally gifted gestalt therapist and, in a sense, Perls' successor at Esalen. Perls never did manage to take over the place, and in 1969 he left to form his own ther-

apy center on Vancouver Island. He died in the spring of 1970.

FOR a time in the sixties, Perls' principal antagonist was William C. Schutz, the field marshal of encounter. Schutz, a psychologist who had taught at Harvard and Berkeley, came to Esalen in 1967 at Murphy's invitation. His approach to encounter was eclectic and experimental. He had led or participated in all kinds of groups and had studied all the new methods—bioenergetics, psychodrama, psychosynthesis, Rolfing—and while he used elements from most of these in his own work, he was also willing to try anything else that suggested itself during the group process. Schutz's idea was always to seek out the trouble spots in a group and go right into them. If two people hated each other, Schutz might get them to wrestle then and there. (Fist-fights were discouraged, but they sometimes happened anyway.) If a seminarian seemed to be uneasy about his or her body, Schutz might try to get that person to strip and show it to the others. The popular success of Schutz's book "Joy," published the year he arrived at Esalen, which described many of these methods, and the frequent appearance of Schutz on television talk shows to discuss his work contributed



no little to the growing fame of Esalen, and also helped to form the popular notion that Esalen *was* encounter—and Schutz's form of encounter, at that. Perls resented this. Schutz and Perls stopped speaking to each other after a while. No one suggested that the two of them wrestle.

When Schutz arrived, Esalen was in the early stages of what George Leonard calls its "big-bang period." Leonard, a senior editor of *Look* and one of Murphy's closest friends—his thinking and writing about Esalen and the human-potential movement have had a strong influence on Murphy's own—was a frequent group leader or participant in seminars at Big Sur during the late sixties. "We really thought we were on the verge of vast breakthroughs that would change the world," he recalls. "The atmosphere in the lodge at mealtimes was just electric with new discoveries; people couldn't sit still through a meal, the vibes were so terrific. I remember once, soon after the media had started to run stories on Esalen, a guy from one of the networks was there wanting to know what we were all about. I talked to him for a while in the dining room, and then I saw Mike Murphy and called him over, and Mike talked, but we weren't really getting to him. Gia Fu Feng came in, and I called *him* over to the table. 'What is Esalen really about, Gia Fu?' I asked. Gia Fu pointed at Mike and at me and at Dick Price, saying, 'I see God! I see God! I see God!'—and walked away. Gia Fu was just unbelievable. Another time, he came tearing into the dining room at lunchtime and said, 'Two women in my group have spontaneous orgasm!' It was like that all the time in those days."

Much of the excitement in the fall of 1966 centered on the residential program for fifteen carefully selected Esalen Fellows, who had agreed to spend nine months at Big Sur. The premise, roughly, was that if people could be brought to heightened states of consciousness in weekend or five-day seminars, what would happen if you gave them nine months of Esalen's battery of psychic stimuli? The fifteen psychic astronauts had been selected, from more than two hundred applicants, by the well-known family psychologist Virginia Satir, who was the director of the program, and a good many of those she had chosen were graduate students or college teachers in psychology or sociology. The program was repeated the following year, with twenty-two residents, and was then dropped.

"It was such grandiose thinking," Murphy said recently. "We had seen these things happening in groups that were epiphanies of some sort of immense power, and we really wanted to see how far we could go with that. The residential program coincided with the whole hippie thing in 1967—the 'summer of love' in San Francisco. It was very much in the spirit of the sixties, when everybody sensed these enormous possibilities just around the corner. There was a kind of drunkenness in the air then. The program was certainly a failure in the sense of not realizing our original intentions. It was just impossible to sustain that level of expectation. Bill Schutz disagrees with me; he still thinks the program was a huge success. It's true that some of our most creative group leaders here came out of it—people like John Heider and Steve Stroud and Stuart Miller. But I think a lot of it was destructive. It shook hell out of people. Of the thirty-seven people in both those seminars, two committed suicide within a year. One had been through a lot of rocky times before she came to Esalen, the other was a psychologist who stayed with us only three months. Of course, there are suicides at the Aurobindo ashram, and on college campuses, too. There definitely is a risk element in any kind of opening-up process. But, to me, our program didn't have the sense of center—the balance—that you have to have if you're going to go very deeply into personal

transformation. It was too wild and chaotic. Some of the residential Fellows would take people down to the baths and get them plunging between the hot water and the cold water, and they'd start to hyperventilate in between, and it was as powerful as taking hallucinogenic drugs. People would start barking like seals! We had to close the baths while this sort of stuff was going on. One week, they tried what they called a 'symbo group,' everybody staying together in physical proximity for a whole week, except to go to the bathroom, and more or less pooling their separate identities—there was no me-you language allowed. The power of this kind of group hypnosis is just astonishing. It can take people to very far-out states. But I have very serious reservations about the long-term results."

Murphy himself took part only intermittently in the residential program. He had had enough of group process after four years, and, anyway, he was too busy with other things. Esalen was growing in all directions, very unsystematically. The building program that today provides accommodations for seventy guests plus a large staff was in full swing. Murphy was away from Big Sur about one week in every four, trying (with little success) to get foundation grants, speaking at colleges and universities, investigating new aspects of the human-potential movement.

There was also the Esalen center in San Francisco, which Murphy



*"I've always been attracted to warm, beautiful women—  
which, I think, says something about me."*



started in the fall of 1967. Like the residential program, the San Francisco center had messianic overtones. Only a small number of people could come to Big Sur—the facilities were limited, and the costs (about a hundred and fifty dollars per person for five days' room and board) tended to make for a clientele that was middle-aged and relatively affluent. Believing strongly that their discoveries held great importance for the larger public, Murphy and some of his colleagues wanted to make the Esalen experience available in a much broader and younger social milieu, and San Francisco seemed the natural place to find this. The Esalen San Francisco center held its first lectures and workshops in Grace Cathedral, thanks largely to the good offices of Bishop James A. Pike, who was a friend and admirer of Murphy's and had lectured at Esalen. (Pike had left the active ministry in 1966, under threat of expulsion for heresy; his former chaplain at Grace Cathedral, David Baar, became the first director of Esalen's San Francisco programs.) Later, the center moved, much to the relief of the Episcopal diocese, to its own quarters, on Union Street, where it was soon offering more than a hundred and fifty programs a year, in everything from aikido to an "awareness workshop for dental professionals."

Tremendous events were impending; everybody at Esalen felt it. The transformation of consciousness was *at hand*, here in California, where the natives seemed ripe for conversion to altered states. Esalen was even solving the racial problem. Black-white "confrontations"—encounter sessions organized by Price Cobbs, a black psychiatrist in San Francisco, and George Leonard, the former *Look* editor, who was now Esalen's vice-president—were being held at Big Sur and in San Francisco. Participants of both races were learning to bring out their hidden racism and their suppressed rage and fear, and were establishing in the process a new paradigm (indispensable word!) for dealing with the troubled situation between the races everywhere. But then Esalen developed a racial problem of its own. An assistant director of the San Francisco center, a white man, got into a heated argument over the telephone with Ronald Brown, a black psychologist and one of the program leaders. Brown felt that he had been insulted. Leonard, Cobbs, and several others in the program decided that the assistant director was a secret racist, and that something would

have to be done. A summit encounter session was set up in the office of Cobbs, and Murphy, who was in New York, was summoned back to attend it. Murphy cancelled a trip to the Menninger Clinic, in Topeka, where he had been scheduled to speak at a conference on altered states, and flew straight to San Francisco.

About a dozen people came to the encounter session, which went on for several hours. The embattled assistant director kept insisting that he had helped to lobby the 1965 Voting Rights Act through Congress and didn't need to prove himself to anyone. After two hours had gone by, they took a ten-minute break, and when they reconvened their target was no longer among them. The group then zeroed in on Murphy. "It wasn't enough to be on the firing line in those days," Murphy recalls. "You had to confess your unconscious racism. God, the language that flew around that room! Maybe if I'd really let fly with my own anger at the whole silly situation it would have been better, but in that kind of situation I just go catatonic—numb. 'What are you going to do about this man?' they kept asking me. I'd ask if they wanted me to fire him, and they'd say no, they wanted him to be emotionally reeducated. They wanted him sent down to Big Sur for six weeks, to 'get in touch with his anger,' and all that. I agreed to that, finally, and everybody left exhausted but happy. But then I got back to the San Francisco office and found that the people at Big Sur were up in arms about my letting Esalen be pushed around by San Francisco program leaders. All the phones were ringing at once. So the next morning I called George Leonard to tell him what was going on. George, who had felt all along that the situation would prove impossible to deal with, gave up at this point. He said, 'Wait a minute, Mike,' and left the phone, and then he came back and said, 'Mike, I'm resigning.'"

Leonard's resignation as vice-president was immediately followed by the resignations of the black program leaders and the collapse of the program.

Price Cobbs, Ron Brown, and another of the black program leaders, named Michael Brown, have since started a highly successful consulting firm in San Francisco, which specializes in organizational development and race relations. All three of them remained friends of Murphy's, as did George Leonard. The controversial assistant director did go to some group-process workshops at Big Sur, but a few months later Murphy fired him anyway. The whole incident could have been averted, Murphy feels now, if he had only handled it a little more skillfully. "It just proved to me the failure of encounter," he said recently. "The whole idea that you can solve anything by shouting at people in a group is ridiculous."

**A**CCORDING to George Leonard, the racial Donnybrook really marked the end of Esalen's big-bang period. The transformation of society was not, perhaps, quite as imminent as had been thought. A new spirit of moderation was growing at Big Sur, which over the years had begun to seem less like an encampment of gypsies and more like a well-planned, well-tended, and rather expensive resort. Some of the extremists there were distressed by the calmer pace. Perls left in 1969 to establish his gestalt-therapy center in Canada. In 1970, a group that included several of the alumni from the residential program went down to Chile to work with Oscar Ichazo, whose Arica movement, heavily influenced by the teachings of Gurdjieff, was preparing to transform society right away. Price was devoting his time mainly to leading gestalt-therapy groups, while a succession of managers struggled to bring order out of the administrative chaos. (Although Big Sur was filled to capacity virtually year-round, the place nearly went bankrupt in 1971.) Murphy spent less and less time at Big Sur. He was busy with the San Francisco center (which consistently lost money), and he was trying to bring some order into his personal life as well.

The past ten years had been a bruising period for him, emotionally and spiritually. Murphy had even plunged into marriage at one point, much to the dismay of his colleagues. According to Price, the two events that really caused Perls to leave the country were the election of Richard Nixon and Murphy's marriage, both of which seemed to him to presage the coming of Nazism. The girl was older than Murphy, beautiful, and twice divorced.





They met in an Esalen seminar, had a stormy two-year affair, and got married on the spur of the moment one night in 1968 after seeing "Zorba the Greek." "We drove up to Carson City, Nevada, where we were married by a midget," Murphy recalls. "He stood on a box, and he looked just like Bucky Fuller, and I knew it couldn't last." For three months afterward, Murphy insisted on keeping the marriage a secret—which did not help relations between the couple. "We had the most tremendous battles," he says. "And meanwhile we were getting therapy from a psychiatric community that stretched for three thousand miles. Abe Maslow, Rollo May, Bill Schutz, John Levy—we broke the best therapists of our time on the prow of that marital ship. Finally, we just wore each other down." They were divorced at the end of 1969.

In a sense, Murphy was also trying to divorce himself from Esalen. The place was his creature—"Esalen is Mike Murphy," Schutz often says—but it had grown to be too successful and too complex and too demanding. Murphy strenuously resisted the efforts of a number of "personal-growth centers" in various parts of the country to associate themselves with Esalen; he was willing to give them all the advice and help they wanted, but he felt that Esalen was big enough already and that to make it the nucleus of an institutional network would endanger its value as a laboratory. Besides, Esalen's imitators often seemed bent on commercializing and vulgarizing the model. There were "growth centers" in California whose program seemed to consist mainly of nudity and recreational sex. Esalen had its share of both, of course, but they were more or less incidental to everything else, in spite of the impression given by a filmed documentary, "Here Comes Every Body," that dealt with an Esalen encounter group; the film was made under the



*"How much disarray will the Party have to be in to turn to you, dear?"*

general supervision of Schutz, at a time when Murphy and Price were both away, and it gave rise to a lot of ill will at Big Sur.

Price and Julian Silverman, an experimental clinical psychologist who came to Big Sur from the National Institute of Mental Health, really ran the operation down there while Murphy ranged farther and farther afield. In 1970, he went to Europe with Stuart Miller (a former Esalen residential Fellow) and Miller's wife, Sara. They held conferences on the human potential in London and spent time there with the psychiatrist R. D. Laing. Laing had been invited to come to Agnews State Hospital, in San Jose, California, by Price and Silverman, who had initiated a three-year experimental program, influenced in part by some of Laing's ideas, to work with schizophrenics—a sort of "breakout center," where patients undergoing schizophrenic crises would be treated not as madmen to be restrained but as individuals going through difficult and possibly creative experiences. (Laing declined, but the Agnews project was carried out, and has attracted consid-

erable attention.) From London, Murphy and the Millers went to Rome to meet Roberto Assagioli, the Italian psychiatrist, who was the founder of psychosynthesis. Assagioli's work had seemed to Murphy to be remarkably close in spirit not only to that of Maslow and the other humanistic psychologists but also to the thinking of Aurobindo. "What Aurobindo called yoga, what Abe Maslow called self-actualization, what Fritz Perls called organismic integrity, Assagioli called psychosynthesis," Murphy said recently. "All these share basically the same idea—that there is a natural tendency toward evolution, toward unfoldment, that pervades the universe as well as the human sphere, and that our job now is to get behind that and make it conscious. But the disciplines that emerge to deal with this unfoldment have to reflect the many-sidedness of the human psyche, and this is why psychosynthesis is so valuable. Assagioli himself was really a man of very wide European culture. He was the truest sage I've ever met."

The following year, Murphy and the Millers travelled together to Rus-



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sia. They had heard reports that the Russians were doing a lot of research into parapsychology (extrasensory perception and other psychic phenomena). "A lot is happening there, but it's hard to know how much of it is government-sponsored," Murphy reported afterward. "One theory is that the Russians thought the Americans were getting into parapsychological research with the idea of exerting influence at a distance, and so they set up a number of laboratories of their own. The person who seemed to be the impresario for parapsychologists, Edward Naumov, was pathetically eager to impress us and work with us, but also to find out everything we knew. We decided he must be some sort of agent, because he had freedom to travel anywhere—whenever we'd change our plans, he would be free to come with us, and he would insist on coming. But then this curious thing happened. We had an invitation to go to Friendship House, in Moscow, which is where they entertain all the big shots. Naumov heard about it, and started pressing us to arrange a convocation of parapsychologists and scientists at Friendship House, and we did—we got the thing set up for about three hundred people to meet there. The day came around, we went to Friendship House, and the director, who seemed very nervous, took us on a tour of the place. After the tour, we asked whether it wasn't time for the meeting to start. The director said that the meeting had been cancelled. He said that Naumov was a charlatan and would be a disgrace to Friendship House. We never could figure the thing out. Later, apparently, Naumov was arrested and imprisoned for two years."

While Murphy and the Millers were in Russia, they also set up an intercontinental experiment in telepathy, which was carried out soon after their return. Murphy, sitting in his studio in San Francisco, concentrated on "sending" a series of images to a Russian telepathist, who was sitting in his room in Moscow, under supervised test conditions, to "receive" them. The Russian did "receive" with remarkable clarity the first image that Murphy sent—a toy wooden elephant from a photograph in a dictionary—but the over-all results of the experiment, Murphy says, were statistically inconclusive.

THE two sides of Michael Murphy's nature were again in conflict. Esalen and the human-potential

movement continued to make large claims on his attention, but the other Michael Murphy, the closet extrovert, was knocking authoritatively to get out. Murphy spent more of his time in his studio on Telegraph Hill, writing and meditating. He was working on "Golf in the Kingdom," a philosophical novel about a Scottish golf pro named Shivas Irons, who quotes from Pythagoras and the Hindu scriptures and scores a nocturnal hole-in-one on the thirteenth hole at "Burningbush" (read St. Andrews) by relying on the force of "true gravity." For the character of Irons, Murphy drew upon several people he knew, including the charismatic Stanford graduate student Walt Page, and the portrait is a lively one. It seemed entirely natural, moreover, for the author to approach philosophy and mysticism by way of sports. Writing the book brought on his own readdiction to golf, which he had been too busy to play for several years. It also strengthened his long-held suspicion that sports could be seen as an American yoga, a path to a true harmony of body and spirit.

Soon after the book appeared, in 1972, Murphy began hearing from people, some of them professional athletes, who had had what Maslow called "peak experiences" similar to those described in "Golf in the Kingdom." One was John Brodie, the highly successful quarterback of the San Francisco 49ers. Brodie, a firm believer in Scientology, had many unusual experiences to relate, including one about a key pass he had thrown in a playoff game with the Washington Redskins in 1971. Even the game films, he said, seemed to show that just as his pass was about to be intercepted by Pat Fischer, the Redskin cornerback, it rose up, above Fischer's outstretched fingers, and (without being deflected) settled into the arms of the 49ers' fleet wide receiver Gene Washington, who ran with it for a touchdown to tie the game, which the 49ers eventually won, 24-20. Brodie had been impressed by "Golf in the Kingdom," and he wanted Murphy to collaborate with him on a book about his own career in football. Murphy readily agreed. He was an ardent Brodie fan, and the thrill of spending time at the 49ers' training camp and seeing their games from the bench was almost too great to bear. Unfortunately, the manuscript was nearly complete before Murphy let Brodie read what he was writing. Murphy had set his imagination to work on the material that Brodie provided him, and the





result was another philosophical novel, with a culminating scene in the Vatican. Brodie wanted no part of it. He subsequently engaged another collaborator, who produced a book, "Open Field," with virtually no mystical overtones; even the story of the miraculous pass to Gene Washington, which had already appeared in *Intellectual Digest* in the version that Murphy wrote, was stripped of any supernatural suggestion. Murphy was disappointed, but he remains a fan of the 49ers, who have been having quarterback trouble since Brodie retired.

Sports as yoga—the idea plucked at Murphy's extrovert nature and led to plans for an Esalen sports program. Although for financial reasons the program is still relatively undeveloped, instruction in "tennis flow" and cross-country skiing and distance running has now joined aikido, Tai Chi Chuan, and energy-awareness workshops in the Esalen curriculum. Murphy himself has taken up distance running. In 1973, at the age of forty-three, he started training with Mike Spino, once a nationally ranked marathon runner, and within a year he ran the mile in five minutes twelve seconds, and the marathon distance, twenty-six miles, in three hours and thirty-nine minutes. Spino says he has never seen anything like it. For Murphy, running has become another form of meditation. He runs at least five miles a day, along the waterfront to the Golden Gate Bridge and back.

For a time in 1974, Murphy thought he had finally escaped from all administrative responsibilities at Esalen. His good friend Richard Farson, a psychologist and the co-founder of the Western Behavioral Sciences Institute, at La Jolla, California, took over as president of Esalen, and Murphy began spending virtually all his time working on the new novel. Just as he was getting well into it, though, Esalen problems boiled up and over. Personality conflicts at Big Sur led to Farson's resignation, and Murphy had to step back in temporarily and assume control. He was immediately faced with the need to make drastic cuts in the San Francisco programs, which had lost more money than usual that year, and to reconsider Esalen's whole future course. Since then, profits from the Big Sur operation have mounted steadily. Most workshops are fully booked months in advance, long-term debts are being paid off, and the place has become so respectable that corporations

regularly send their employees there for emotional loosening up. Esalen, in fact, is no longer really at the cutting edge of the New Consciousness movement. EST, Arica, and Transcendental Meditation are more in the news at the moment, and a host of newer and perhaps stranger disciplines are undoubtedly slouching toward California to be born.

Counter-revolutionary forces have also surfaced here and there. A couple of years ago, some California legislators wanted to introduce a bill to make encounter groups illegal unless they were led by a licensed psychiatrist. Murphy, called to Sacramento to give his views, pointed out that such a law would be practically unenforceable—for one reason, because so many encounter sessions these days take place in churches: how could you prove that the group wasn't discussing the New Testament? The proposed bill died, but the attacks from both the behavioral psychologists and the orthodox psychiatrists continue. Encounter, with its here-and-now orientation and its emphasis on the exploration of spontaneous feelings, is accused of being anti-intellectual and anti-scientific; the spontaneity of the group is seen as spurious, and the group pressure as incipiently Fascistic. A significant percentage of encounter-group participants, it is said, come away emotionally damaged in one way or another, and relatively few draw any lasting benefit from the experience.

A recent, widely circulated study of encounter-group participants at Stanford claimed that sixteen of two hundred and six volunteers suffered psychological injury. Schutz, in a published reply, called the study wholly misleading and blatantly unscientific, and pointed out that a large proportion of the participants actually took part in group processes that had nothing to do with encounter. "The basic principles of encounter are honesty and responsibility,"

Schutz often says. "What could be more homey?" Murphy agrees that the "casualty rates" of encounter have been exaggerated, but he sees some truth in the persistent criticism. The original error, he sometimes feels, may have been to think of encounter as therapy. People came to groups, went through emotional changes, and left thinking that the new insights would carry over into their regular life; when this didn't happen, they got depressed and discouraged. Perhaps it would have been better if they had approached the experience

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more for its own sake. Both Murphy and Price suspect that the experience of encounter may be closer to that of theatre than to that of therapy. One can be emotionally stirred by a performance of "Hamlet" without expecting life to be different afterward.

"People sometimes come away from Esalen and leave their jobs, get divorced—things like that," Murphy said not long ago. It was after dinner at the Murphys' house in Mill Valley, a cool evening, the light from a fire the room's only illumination. "This is a part of our reputation that's true. Naturally, it's offensive to the medical viewpoint that is oriented toward fixing people up so they'll be well adjusted to their own society. Esalen has been subversive toward that kind of psychiatry. Some psychiatrists also mistrust us because we use lay people as group leaders—even though recent studies by the National Institute of Mental Health show that lay people very often have more talent for therapy than professional psychiatrists. A great many psychiatrists are interested mainly in keeping the door that Freud opened from opening any wider. The psychiatrists' reduction of the mystical was a theme of the Salinger stories that had such a huge effect on me in the fifties. I read 'Franny' when I was at Stanford, and, God, it hit me like a ton of bricks. What resonance! Salinger was a great ally in those days. A lot of people really thought I was crazy then, and I wasn't too sure they weren't right—I needed reassurance. What happened in the sixties was this incredible comeback of the whole mystical side of things. Esalen certainly had a role in that, along with the drug scene and the counterculture. Now there are signs that maybe the medical establishment is opening up a little. For example, Stuart and Sara Miller have started a three-year project to expose a limited number of doctors and nurses to some of the work we've been doing at Esalen—psychosynthesis, gestalt therapy, encounter, massage, biofeedback techniques to alleviate pain, and so forth—with the idea of making medical practice more humane. The project started at Esalen, but now it's independently funded, and still being run by the Millers. Sara also started a teacher-training project in connection with the University of California at Santa Barbara, under a grant from the Ford Foundation, on more or less the same basis—getting these new ideas and methods into education. The thing is just spreading everywhere you look."

After a pause, Murphy said, "There's no question about it. We're going to explore mind. We come into it as adventurers, sometimes as drunken sailors, and some aspects of this thing get very crazy, and even demonic. The power of group process is almost limitless, and it can be very, very dangerous. I'm aware that we're assuming responsibility for human lives in much of what we do at Esalen, and that there's a big risk in encouraging people to transcend themselves. I'm aware that Madness Gulch is right around the corner. But it's going to be done. The hunger for this sort of thing is simply enormous, and the risks are worth taking. Of course, one of the things I really hate is encounter as a religion. I love Bill Schutz for his solid strength—he's very comforting to be around—but because he's made out of India rubber



and keeps bouncing back from every kind of confrontation I think he under-rates the dangers. To run an encounter group or a gestalt-therapy group for nine months is just not the answer. Esalen has been great for these opening-up exercises but not for the long haul. The problem is to find sustaining ways of life, sustaining disciplines, and, to me, Roberto Assagioli's psychosynthesis points toward the kind of comprehensive spirit that's needed. You can't live on encounter. Encounter is like an initiation ceremony, a way of crossing a boundary and looking at what's on the other side. I feel that in future disciplines encounter groups as we have known them will have a very small place, while meditation techniques and approaches like psychosynthesis will have a very large one. The human-potential movement as a whole has its own inherent logic, it seems, that is corresponding more and more with the great contemplative traditions of the past."

Murphy was quiet for a while, gazing into the fire. "Vision's still dawning," he said. "The instinct for transformation has existed since Paleolithic times, and has developed in many ways through shamanistic and religious traditions. But now we have a chance as never before to draw from all these traditions and learn from both their weaknesses and their strengths. Nearly all of them have been limited in one way or another—neglecting society, like some of the ascetic Indian yogas, or belittling the body or failing to integrate the mind. Aurobindo was one of the pioneers in this kind of integration. And now there's an incredibly strong impulse to bring the body back in. At



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Esalen, for example, the body came into things immediately—it was all around me right away. I think that the physical body and the social body go along together, and that the transformation has to involve them both. From our modern vantage point, we can develop broader and more sophisticated disciplines, I think, and throw back the horizons for the next stage of the human ascent.”

Asked how he foresaw the transformation as taking place, Murphy said that he saw both a horizontal and a vertical direction to it. “The horizontal one is that more and more points of access into this richness are becoming available. The human-potential thing is spreading all through the culture. Old-age groups, hospitals, schools, prisons, community centers—there are a million ramifications. There’s also the factor of necessity—closing time in the gardens of the West. The ecology movement is helping to spread the idea that transformation is possible and necessary, and so is the breakdown of so many of our traditional institutions. I think there will be pioneers—pirates of the spirit, like Jacob Atabet. It’s the thing I want to do for the rest of my life. I think that as people appear who make these voyages into the interior, into inner space, each voyage will be an inciting act. Just like Lewis and Clark opening up the West: My God, now there’s all that to discover! I think I’m going to have to take about a year and go back and do what I did in the fifties—meditate eight hours a day every day—to see where I am now. Have these last thirteen years loosened things up to allow me to get to spaces I couldn’t get to before? I owe myself at least that experiment. If I push too hard or too fast, I’ll wreck myself. We each have a kind of right speed. There’s still going to be the intensity and excitement. It may even be greater now, without all the wild storming of the gates that went on in the sixties, and all the bad trips. There will still be bad trips, too, of course; a lot of experiments of this kind will end badly—some already have. The space program is a good analogy. To go really far, you have to be well organized. For my own part, though, I think there’s going to be plenty of room for adventure.”

—CALVIN TOMKINS



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